

**Amendments to the Claims**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. - 14. (canceled)

15. (currently amended) A computer program product within a computer readable medium for combining first and second attribute sets, each comprising at least one attribute and value pair comprising a named attribute assigned a value that comprises one of a ~~end~~ first value and a ~~further~~ another attribute set in addition to the first and second attribute sets; the computer program product comprising:

instructions arranged to control the operation of a computing apparatus running the program product to cause the apparatus to carry out a merge operation to ~~thereby~~ generate a ~~new~~ merged attribute set by applying to the first and second attribute sets, as items-to-be-merged, a merge operator by which:

where at least one of the items-to-be-merged is a said ~~end~~ first value, the value of the merged items is the value of one of the items-to-be-merged; and

where both first and second attribute sets, as items-to-be-merged, are attribute sets, the value of the merged items comprises:

the attribute and value pairs of attributes that

occur in only one of the items-to-be-merged, and

attribute and value pairs for attributes occurring in both items-to-be-merged with the value of each such pair being the value resulting from the application of the merge operator to the values of the attribute appearing in each item-to-be-merged, the merge operator being recursively applied as required to merge the attribute values.

16. (currently amended) The computer program product according to claim 15, wherein where at least one said attribute is assigned a value that is a reference to a said named attribute, the merge operation comprises repeatedly carrying out the following steps (a) and (b) in succession:

(a) recursively applying the merge operator until a reference is encountered as a said item-to-be-merged; and

(b) de-referencing an encountered reference by:

(i) where the reference is to a named attribute to which ~~an end~~ a first value or attribute set is assigned, copying that value or set; and

(ii) where the reference is to the start of a chain of two or more references each pointing to a respective named attribute the value of which is the next reference in the chain with the chain ending when a reference in the chain points to a named attribute to which ~~an end~~ a first value or attribute set is assigned, following the chain of

references and copying the ~~end~~ first value or set at the end of the chain.

17. (canceled)

18. (currently amended) The computer program product according to claim 15, wherein where at least one conformance predicate is associated with at least one of said first and second attribute sets, the program product is arranged to cause the computing apparatus, in carrying out the merge operation, to carry across to the resulting set produced by the merge operation all the conformance predicates associated with the first and second sets.

19. (currently amended) The computer program product according to claim 18, wherein the program product is arranged to cause the computing apparatus to evaluate, following the merge operation, the or each conformance predicate associated with the resultant set.

20. (currently amended) The computer program product according to claim 15, wherein where a group of one or more identifiers is associated with each of the first and second sets, the program product is arranged to cause the computing apparatus, in carrying out the said merge operation on the first and second sets, to create a group of identifiers for the set produced by

the merge operation, this group comprising a unique identifier for the set and the identifiers contained in the group of identifiers of the first and second sets.

21. (currently amended) The computer program product according to claim 20, wherein the program product is arranged to cause the computing apparatus to test the provenance of one said set produced by the merge operation by comparing an associated group of identifiers of said one set with the group of identifiers of another said set, said one set being determined as being derived from said other set when all the identifiers of the group of identifiers associated with said other set are contained in the group of identifiers associated with said one set.

22. (currently amended) The computer program product according to claim 15, wherein where at least one said attribute is assigned a value that is a reference to a said named attribute and a group of one or more identifiers is associated with each of said first and second sets, the program product is arranged to cause the computing apparatus, in carrying out the said merge operation on the first and second sets: whenever a reference is resolved by copying a set, to associate a group of identifiers with the copy, this group comprising a new unique identifier for the copy and the identifiers of the group of identifiers of the set that has been copied; and to create a group of identifiers for the set produced by the merge operation, this group comprising a said unique identifier for the set and the identifiers contained in the group of identifiers of the first

and second sets.

23. (currently amended) The computer program product according to claim 22, wherein the program product is arranged to cause the computing apparatus to test the provenance of one said set by comparing an associated group of identifiers of said one set with the group of identifiers of another set, said one set being determined as being derived from said other set when all the identifiers of the group of identifiers associated with said other set are contained in the group of identifiers associated with said one set.

24. (currently amended) The computer program product according to claim 15, wherein the program product is arranged to cause the computing apparatus to carry out the merge operation in respect of at least one other attribute set in addition to said first and second attribute sets, the merge operation being effected first on said first and second attribute sets and then the resultant set being merged with a first of the other sets, and the set so produced ~~thereby~~ being merged with any remaining other set in a recursive manner.

25. (currently amended) The computer program product according to claim 15, wherein the first attribute set is a resource description, the second attribute set being combined with the resource description by the merge operator to set preselected ~~and~~ first values for at least one of the attributes of the

resource description.

26. (currently amended) The computer program product according to claim 15, wherein both the first and second attribute sets are resource descriptions, these descriptions being combined by the merge operator to form a resource description for a new resource that includes the attributes of both the first and second resource descriptions.

27. (currently amended) Computer apparatus for combining first and second attribute sets each comprising at least one attribute and value pair by which a named attribute is assigned a value that comprises one of a ~~end~~ first value and a ~~further~~ another attribute set in addition to the first and second attribute sets; the apparatus comprising a set merging arrangement for carrying out a merge operation to generate a ~~new~~ merged attribute set, the set merging arrangement comprising: merge operator means for applying a merge operator to items to be merged, and control means for controlling the carrying out of said merge operation, the control means being arranged to apply said first and second attribute sets, as items to be merged, to the merge operator means; the merge operator means comprising: first means operative, where at least one of the items to be merged is a said ~~end~~ first value, to cause the value of the merged items to be the value of one of the said items to be merged; and second means, operative where both first and second attribute sets, as items to be merged, are attribute sets, to cause the value of the merged items to comprise: the attribute

and value pairs of attributes that occur in only one of the items-to-be-merged, and attribute and value pairs for attributes occurring in both items to be merged with the value of each such pair being the value resulting from the application of the merge operator to the values of the attribute appearing in each item to be merged, the control means causing the merge operator to be recursively applied by merge operator means as required to merge the attribute values.